

Situationism versus Situationism

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Abstract Most discussions of John Doris's situationism center on what can be called *descriptive situationism*, the claim that our folk usage of global personality and character traits in describing and predicting human behavior is empirically unsupported. Philosophers have not yet paid much attention to another central claim of situationism, which says that given that local traits are empirically supported, we can more successfully act in line with our moral values if, in our deliberation about what to do, we focus on our situation instead of on our moral character. Call this *prescriptive situationism*. In this paper, we will point toward a previously unrecognized tension between these two situationist theses and explore some ways for the situationist to address it.

Keywords Virtue Ethics · John Doris · Situationism · Character · Virtue

1 Introduction

That there is such a thing as character is a central tenet of folk morality. We all know people we take to be honest, compassionate, or something of the sort. And we have little doubt that notions of character are useful when explaining and predicting the behavior of others, or when deliberating about one's moral choices. We explain that the stranger who returned our lost wallet did so because she is honest, we predict that our compassionate friend will help others in times of distress, and when tempted to recount our accomplishments with boastful glee, we refrain because we want to be modest.¹ As most of us see things, our characters are like our educations: good or bad, we all have one.

Yet this folk conception of character has recently been challenged by John Doris's situationism.² Situationism has its nascence in the social and personality psychologies and can be taken as an adherence to the following four theses (which will be spelled out in later

¹For studies showing our widespread predilection to use character traits see Kunda & Nisbett (1986)

²See his (1998) and (2002), and cf. Harman, who advocates a much more austere version of the situationist thesis (1999).

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sections): (1) global traits are empirically inadequate; (2) local traits are empirically adequate; (3) global trait language can be detrimental to agential thriving; and (4) moral improvement can be brought about most effectively by attending to situational features, as opposed to aiming at the cultivation of character traits.

Most discussions of John Doris's situationism focus on the first pair of claims, what we will call *descriptive situationism*. Philosophers have not yet paid much attention to another side of situationism: the second pair of claims. Call this *prescriptive situationism*. Our plan here is not to criticize either descriptive situationism or prescriptive situationism in isolation. Rather, in this paper, we will bring into relief a previously unrecognized tension between these two situationist theses and explore some ways for the situationist to address that tension.

2 A Brief Survey of the Situationist Literature

2.1 Hartshorne and May (1928)

In Hartshorne and May's famous 1928 study, elementary and secondary school children were observed in a broad range of classroom and non-classroom situations for their honesty. Three honesty-related behavioral measures were tested: willingness to steal small amounts of money when believing they were unobserved, willingness to cheat on a test when getting caught appeared highly improbable, and willingness to lie about their own dishonest behavior. Although correlations between behaviors in similar situations were extremely high (0.79), the correlations between the cross-situational measures were low enough (0.23) so as to render impotent the kind of predictive power one might expect from genuinely robust instances of dishonesty.³

2.2 Isen and Reeve

Isen and Reeve (2005) investigated the influence of positive affect on task choice and responsible completion of work. In one experiment, subjects who were offered a \$2 box of chocolates or candies (their choice) completed work tasks (circling strings of letters that were alphabetically ordered amid a sea of letters that were not) more quickly and as accurately as those who received no gift. Moreover, subjects spent the remainder of their time working on a subjectively desirable task. The positive affect subjects rated that desirable task as even more enjoyable than the group that did not receive the humble gift.

This study builds upon the earlier Isen and Levin experiment (1972) in which people who found a dime in a pay phone were said to be more likely to help others. While there is some debate as to whether the Isen and Levin experiment has been successfully replicated, the Isen and Reeve studies seem to suggest that humble, unexpected, but desirable findings make people enjoy what they do and work more efficiently. Perhaps, then, much of what counts as being industrious is really a matter of seeing the reward at the end of the labor.

2.3 Milgram

Perhaps the most often cited evidence for situationism is Stanley Milgram's 1974 experiment that revealed the horrific lengths people will go to in order to obey instructions of those in a perceived position of power. Subjects were presented with what they were told was an

³ For a discussion of the Hartshorne and May findings, including numerous dissenting opinions on the matter, see Burton (1963).

experiment to test the efficacy of a particular teaching strategy. According to the strategy in question, learning is most effective when incorrect responses are punished. In order to test this theory the subjects were asked to administer shocks whenever another subject (actually, a confederate) gave the wrong answer to a question. The confederate was placed in an adjacent room, leaving the subject and a researcher (actually a second confederate) alone in a room. The subject was seated before a machine that would “deliver the shocks” when the subject flipped the appropriate switch. The rules were simple: beginning with 15 V, and increasing in increments of 15, each successive incorrect answer was to be greeted with a shock. The severity of shocks fell into the following categories, which were displayed on the machine: slight, moderate, strong, very strong, intense, extreme intensity, and danger: severe shock - XXX.

In the experiment-within-the-experiment the confederate proceeded to give incorrect responses. The subject pressed the button, delivering a “shock.” In fact, the confederate was not being shocked. The test was designed to monitor how compliant the subject would be when he believed himself to be shocking someone. Pre-recorded reactions to the shocks, heard over a speaker by the subject, ranged from a surprised “Ouch!” to screaming and banging on the wall. At 330 V, the confederate ceased to respond. A full 65 % (26 of 40) of subjects proceeded to administer the shocks through to 450 V, long after the confederate had become unresponsive.

2.4 Zimbardo

Philip Zimbardo’s 1971 experiment is one of the most shocking in the situationist literature because Zimbardo, a Professor of Psychology at Stanford University at the time, has since expressed dismay at the way he himself became caught up in the experiment. The so-called Stanford Prison Experiment saw undergraduate volunteers split into two groups. Those in the convict group were “arrested” on campus before being taken to the prison, which was staffed by the remaining volunteers, who served as prison guards. Zimbardo, who served as warden of the prison, gave one rule to the guards: no physical violence was permitted during the two-week experiment.

No physical violence was needed to produce horrifying results. Mattresses, food, and access to toilet facilities became luxuries; prisoners were stripped and subjected to sexual humiliation; Zimbardo, for his part, did not call off the experiment until an outside observer suggested that things had gone too far. In fact, Zimbardo admits that in a conversation with one subject’s father, he himself attempted to blame the subject for being weak and “unable to handle” the experiment.⁴ The experiment came to a halt after just six days, after numerous prisoners complained of despair and depression.

3 Descriptive Situationism

In light of this literature (and a vast and growing literature much like it⁵), Doris has argued that there are two important conclusions to draw about human moral psychology. First, consider:

DS1 Robust character traits provide empirically inadequate explanations of human functioning.

⁴ Zimbardo (1999) <http://www.prisonexp.org/psychology/24> (Accessed 21 March, 2010)

⁵ See, for example: Blass (1996), Darley (1995), Doris & Murphy (2007), Elms (1995), Goldhagen (1996); Haney & Zimbardo (1998), Latané & Darley (1970), Lutsky (1995), Meeus & Raaijmakers (1995), Miller (1995), Modigliani & Rochat (1995), Newcomb (1929), Rochat and Modigliani (1995), Rosenthal (1999), Sears (1963), and Zimbardo (2007).

On a very common and traditional view of character traits, Doris claims, if a person possesses a character trait X, then that person will consistently act X-ly across a broad spectrum of X-relevant situations. For example, take the robust trait of compassion. A person who is compassionate can be expected to act compassionately in those situations where compassion is called for: when a lone, near-sighted grandmother needs to be helped across a four-lane highway, when a complete stranger drops a stack of papers at your feet, when your partner needs a hug, and so on. A compassionate person's psychology is organized in such a way that allows her not only to recognize those situations in which compassion is called for but also to respond compassionately in a reliable manner, often, perhaps, without even recognizing that what she is doing is the "compassionate" thing. It will come as second nature.

Since we believe that we know honest, courageous, and compassionate folk, and indeed that most of our friends are basically good people, we should see a good deal of consistently virtuous behavior, for any virtue. Furthermore, we should expect that those people performing consistently honest acts, for instance, do so *because* they possess the trait. The empirical data does not suggest, however, that this is an accurate picture of the behavior of most humans. The folk psychological view of moral agents like you and me, carrying around with us a constellation of robust character traits that regularly issue in honest, compassionate, or courageous (or lazy, dishonest, cowardly, etc.) behavior begins to look a bit quaint in light of the large and impressive body of literature showing that situations, and not persons, often have the final say in how we act.

Consider the case of Lynndie England, the former American Army Reservist, who served jail time for inflicting physical, psychological, and sexual abuse on Iraqi prisoners of war at Abu Ghraib. In one appalling photo, England is shown pointing "finger guns" with apparent glee at a detainee who, in a line with other Iraqis, was being forced to masturbate. In an interview with the German magazine *Stern*, England, who was then engaged to be married to another reservist, Specialist Charles Graner, explains why she posed for the photo:

Graner and [Staff Sergeant Ivan] Frederick tried to convince me to get into the picture with this guy. I didn't want to, but they were really persistent about it. At the time I didn't think that it was something that needed to be documented but I followed Graner. I did everything he wanted me to do. I didn't want to lose him.⁶

Although we have no way to be certain, we suspect that in "cooler" deliberative contexts (say, a Starbucks in Destin, Florida), England, much like the subjects in Milgram's experiments, would have refused unequivocally to allow and to perpetrate such a despicable deed. We suspect that England is "basically" a good person, whatever that means. We have no trouble reasonably supposing that she was "at-home-with-her-kittens compassionate" and "around-little-old-ladies compassionate" but not "in-charge-of-Iraqi-detainees-and-being-bossed-around-by-fiancé-at-Abu Ghraib compassionate." But if England's behavior is sensitive to situational factors like this, how is it that she could possess the robust character trait of "compassion" or the global personality of trait of "being a decent person"? What guarantees do we have that we would not ourselves do the very same thing, and not just in these more extreme cases, but in pedestrian cases, as well—like when asked to perform a simple work task in the office?

The empirically respectable answer—and the answer given by the situationist—is to say that we rarely have such guarantees. And this, so the argument goes, provides good evidence for thinking that robust character traits (the ones used by the folk to explain and predict

⁶ Streck & Wiechmann (2008) <http://www.stern.de/politik/ausland/lyndie-england-rumsfeld-knew-614356.html> (Accessed 4 September, 2009)

behavior and by virtue ethicists to ground morality and guide deliberation) are few and far between. In other words, robust character traits like compassion are *empirically inadequate*: moral agents like us really do not have the kinds of robust character traits that we are so accustomed to use when predicting or explaining moral behavior.⁷ Jim, a jovial mailman, may be kind when delivering mail on 6th Street, but this does not mean that he is *cross-situationally* kind (when at home with his terribly annoying family, or even on 7th Street), for the evidence tells us that, most likely, he is not *that* kind.

Doris does not, however, reject the claim that there are at least *some persons* who possess at least *some personality or character traits*. There are, he admits, what he calls “pure types” (Doris 2002, p. 65). Sociopaths may cross-situationally fail to exhibit compassion; depressives may cross-situationally exhibit melancholic affect. But this kind of consistency, Doris claims, derives from the pathology or abnormality of these behavioral profiles (Doris 2002, p. 65). “At the other end of the spectrum,” however, “some individuals may quite consistently exhibit compassion or elation; while the positive associations of such tendencies don’t invite attributions, this sort of consistency is rare enough to count as abnormal” (Doris 2002, p. 65). He concludes:

Indeed, behavioral inconsistency reflects the adaptability associated with successful social functioning; the norms of locker rooms and luncheons require different behaviors (see Shoda and Mischel 1996: 420-1). While substantial behavioral inconsistency may confound our interpretive and ethical categories, it may also signal sound mental health! (Doris 2002, p. 65)

With respect to the possibility of “pure types,” Doris makes two claims. First, that persons with cross-situationally robust traits are very rare, and second, that the possession of a robust trait, regardless of its moral valence is in some way psychologically abnormal or sub-optimal: a symptom of less than “sound mental health.” This is telling, and we shall return to it below in our discussion of situationist deliberation.⁸

But if Doris is right that cross-situational consistency is not only rare but psychologically abnormal, what explains the apparent explanatory and predictive power of robust traits of so many “normal” folk? Certainly it *seems* like we know people who are compassionate, or courageous, or kind. The apparent robustness of traits, Doris argues, can be explained in terms of the stability of local traits, which, unlike cross-situational consistency, *is* evinced by the empirical literature. People do tend to be very consistent in their behavior in the tightly circumscribed sets of situations in which we observe them. Your partner may have no doubt that you would resist sexual advances in her company, or at your place of work, or at the grocery. She may have the utmost confidence in you, her ever-faithful partner, in such situations. But given the limited nature of the evidence she has, and the lessons of the situationist research program, should she be as confident in your “faithfulness” in a hotel room alone with a former flame from your graduate school years? As uncomfortable as it might make us, the empirically respectable answer appears to be a resounding negative.

Because we do not typically observe others, even our intimates, “across diverse situations with highly variable degrees of trait-conduciveness” our character trait ascriptions will be based on a very limited data set (Doris 2002, p. 66). But the reason it comes so naturally to identify those who are kind or compassionate or greedy or arrogant is because “local traits

⁷ “Globalism,” Doris says, “is an empirically inadequate account of human functioning” (2002, p. 61).

⁸ These claims are important for understanding Doris’s motivation for his general approach. If broad-based (global) traits that issue in stable behavior are not conducive to “successful social functioning” and “sound mental health,” then what are they? Presumably something to be avoided.

should underwrite very substantial behavior predictability in their narrowly specified domains; invoking them to explain behavior is a reasonable way to understand the ‘contribution’ of personological factors to behavioral outcomes without problematically inflating expectations of consistency” (Doris 2002, p. 66).

In other words, there is good evidence for thinking that people like us exhibit a trait like honesty when faced with similar kinds of situations, but not honesty across diverse kinds of trait-relevant situations. This brings into relief the second thesis of descriptive situationism:

DS2 Local character traits provide empirically adequate explanations of human functioning.

This thesis amounts to the claim that where global traits fail to make sense of the instabilities we humans exhibit across situations, local traits explain *both* the local patterns of successes and the cross-situational failures. Tommy’s teachers think Tommy is honest because he is “not-cheating-honest,” but his parents think of him as dishonest because he also has the “steals-Mom’s-change” trait, among others.

Explaining the seemingly impeccable behavior of those we regard as moral paragons is no difficult task when armed with the language of local character traits, the situationist can argue. Many “moral paragons” are those whose life is steeped in routine, in engaging in familiar behaviors regularly, and in avoiding temptation one is accustomed to avoiding. “Around-the-office-compassion” is much easier to come by than compassion-full-stop. So most of those who are apparently in possession of broad-based “traditional” character traits really just possess local traits and are fortunate (or unfortunate, as the case may be) enough to find themselves facing situations for which their narrow traits are sufficient to guide behavior reliably.

Of course, explaining behavior is only one task assigned to character traits. This task falls largely into the realm of psychology. Traits are also called to duty in prescriptive projects, and this is often a task in the realm of philosophy. So even if it is true that narrow traits are empirically adequate for explaining behavior, it is a further question whether they are preferable to global traits when it comes to building a prescriptive program. In particular, the question of prescriptive adequacy is what is best suited for the practical aims of ethical reflection (Doris 2002, p. 112). With this in mind, we turn to the prescriptive claims of situationism.

4 Prescriptive Situationism

DS1 and DS2 are descriptive claims. They purport to tell us something about human psychology: that by and large humans do not possess robust personality or character traits; however, humans do often possess local personality and character traits. The immediate lesson to be learned from descriptive situationism is that many (if not most or all) of our ascriptions of robust character and personality traits to those whom we know or with whom we come into contact are false. People just *are not* that way. Our widespread predilection to use robust character traits to predict and explain behavior, therefore, encounters epistemological difficulties, and so epistemic caution might suggest that we cease to use them.

But for Doris, the problem with our use of global character traits is not just an epistemological one:

It’s not just that global condemnations are typically unwarranted but that they are often ethically suspect. It is no accident, I think, that the discourse of character often plays

against a background of social stratification and elitism [...] It seems there is a tendency for an ethic of character to degenerate into a caste of characters. Perhaps the emphasis on personal evaluation naturally tends, in social creatures like us; when this comparative evaluation turns to global condemnation, it may poison social interaction. (Doris 2002, p. 168)

We take it that Doris's point is roughly this: our use global traits like 'lazy', 'creepy', 'uncivilized', 'rude', and 'abusive' in our moral discourse about persons invites moral emotions typically associated with moral disapprobation: resentment, indignation, anger, and disgust, which can, Doris continues, "effect a sort of 'moral murder'—a denial of membership in the community of respect-worthy persons" (Doris 2002, p. 168).⁹ Any socio-ethical practice that relies so heavily on "global condemnation" of individuals and groups who have found themselves in situations not by their own choosing, may very well be "inimical to community, charity and forgiveness" (Doris 2002, p. 168). Perhaps we are all too eager to make moral decisions, at both an interpersonal level and at the level of public policy, based on ascriptions of globalist traits that are not actually there. For both epistemological and ethical reasons, then, Doris concludes that we should take a good, hard look at how globalist ascriptions of character traits poison our world, and suggests that we might do others better by resisting their use.

We have just described one kind of prescription that Doris believes to fall out of his descriptive project. Call it PS1:

PS1: For both epistemological and ethical reasons, we should try to resist the use of global character and personality ascriptions when explaining and predicting behavior.

Although PS1 is an interesting claim, and one that has not received much attention in the literature on situationism, we will not be addressing it. Rather, we will be focusing on another kind of prescriptive claim that Doris believes to follow from his descriptive project—a claim about how we should engage in first-person moral deliberation about what to do in light of the descriptive project.¹⁰ Consider the following scene Doris sets for us:

Imagine that a colleague with whom you have had a long flirtation invites you over for dinner, offering the enticement of interesting food and elegant wine, with the excuse that you are temporarily orphaned while your spouse is out of town. Let's assume the obvious way to read this text is the right one, and assume further that you regard the infidelity that may result as an ethically undesirable outcome. If you are like one of Milgram's respondents, you might think that there is little cause for concern; you are, after all, an upright person, and a spot of claret never did anyone a bit of harm. On the other hand, if you take the lessons of situationism to heart, you avoid the dinner like the plague, because you know that you are not able to confidently predict your behavior in a problematic situation on the basis of your antecedent values. You do not doubt that you sincerely value fidelity; you simply doubt your ability to act in conformity with this value once the candles are lit and the wine begins to flow. Relying on character once in the situation is a mistake, you agree; the way to achieve the ethically desirable result is to

⁹ Strictly speaking, this claim is problematic. The fact that we *do* respond to these sorts of persons with the so-called reactive attitudes reveals, not that we have excluded them from the moral community, but that we in fact take them to be *full members of our moral community*, members liable to the full range of our practices of holding morally blameworthy for conduct and character, a basic Strawsonian point (see, for example, McKenna 2012 and Wallace 1994).

¹⁰ Even here, however, we are not interested in challenging the truth of this prescriptive claim discussed below. Rather, we wish to call attention to a seemingly problematic tension generated by the acceptance of this claim along with the descriptive claims we have already discussed.

recognize that situational pressures may all too easily overwhelm character and avoid the dangerous situation. I don't think it wild speculation to claim that this is a better strategy than dropping by for a "harmless" evening, secure in the knowledge of your righteousness. (Doris 2002, p. 147)

There is another lesson to be drawn, then, from the descriptive project, one having to do with the strategies we employ in our first-person deliberation about our conduct so that we act in line with our values. Instead of concerning ourselves with inculcating a certain kind of character, we should attend to the features of our environment. We should direct our ethical gaze, so to speak, away from *ourselves* and towards our *environment*. If we are in those environments that influence our behavior positively, we will be more likely to behave in ways that are in line with our deeply held values.¹¹

If we want success in acting in line with our values, then we ought to become skilled situation-choosers—adept at recognizing which situations are morally dangerous so that we avoid them in the first place. Alternately, we can trade on our local trait stability by choosing those situations we know to impart desirable behavioral outcomes reliably. Much of our moral decision-making, then, will take place in moral "cool-zones," not the morally "hot" climes of Temptation Island. This may mean deciding long before you leave for work that you will take the long way home, if you know that, as a former smoker, the shortest route passes the cheapest tobacco store in town. Given the "practical risks" of favoring deliberative "strategies emphasizing the 'steadfast exercise of the will,'" we have better reason to utilize those strategies of "skilled self-manipulation" (Doris 2002, p. 149).¹² This lesson of situationism therefore expands the purview of our moral duties. We have moral obligations not only to "do the right thing" (e.g. not carry on conversations with old flames behind our partners' backs) we also have an obligation to be good at situation-choosing (e.g. to decide that we will not even put ourselves in a position where such conversations could reasonably take place). Doris explains:

The condemnation for ethical failure might very often be directed not at a particular failure of the will but at a certain culpable naiveté or insufficiently careful attention to situations. The implication of this is that our duties may be surprisingly complex, involving not simply obligations to particular action but a sort of 'cognitive duty' to attend, in our deliberations, to the determinative features of situations." (Doris 2002, p. 148)

Moral deliberation that involves skilled self-manipulation about situations, however, offers no guarantees. We will often lack relevant knowledge, not only about the nature of the situation as we enter it, but about what effect certain features of our situations will have on us. Such is life. But if the key question concerns which deliberative strategy is *best suited* for the practical aims of ethical reflection, the situationist literature should leave no doubt that strategies of situation-choosing should win out over strategies of characterological brinkmanship.¹³ We will be much more successful in acting in line with our values if we pay closer attention to our situations rather than our characters. When someone becomes good at choosing morally-conducive situations and conjoining diverse sets of morally-conducive

¹¹ This seems tame. If you receive two invitations for company on Friday evening, one to study with a friend at the library, another to cruise onto Rush St. in Chicago with a hard-drinking group of misogynist co-workers, the morally-conducive situation seems obvious enough. As Doris sees things, if you apply this prescription for deliberation when faced with moral choices, you have a greater chance for success than if you had banked on your strong character, but found yourself bombarded with pressures to vice the whole evening, one which climaxes with a dazed and confused taxi ride back home.

¹² For more on exercises of skilled self-control, see Mele (1987).

¹³ See Doris (2002, p. 112).

situations, one's behavioral outcomes may even look and feel as if they are coming from *her*, or some robust character trait that *she* has. But they are not; they are the result of her choice in situation, from which point her local traits "take over," helping to promote moral success where characterological approaches would falter.

To review, then, Doris claims that there are two lessons to be drawn from his prescriptive situationist project: PS1, which, as we saw, is a claim about how we should alter our moral discourse, and PS2, which is a claim about how we should alter our first-person moral deliberation:

PS2: If we desire to affect behavioral outcomes more in line with our values, we should, in our first-person deliberation, attend more to the determinative features of situations and less to the putative robustness of our characters.

5 Appropriating Situationist Deliberation

Doris's situationist project has had its fair share of detractors.¹⁴ As far as we know, however, all of the criticisms lodged against situationism have in one way or another argued either one or both of two related claims: (a) that the empirical research that Doris cites does not, in fact, warrant either of his descriptive claims (DS1 or DS2), or (b) Doris takes as his foil a very naïve and simplistic account of character and therefore has argued only that the empirical evidence undermines a strawman, a view of character that no philosopher has seriously advanced in the first place.¹⁵ A common criticism, for example, is that Doris has tested for virtue only in terms of frequency of trait-relevant *action*. But if a virtue is not just a disposition to action, but a disposition to act for (certain kinds of) *reasons*, we could learn nothing about someone's reasons for acting unless Doris can show that there is a plausible connection between the frequency of action and the agent's reasons for action (Annas 2005; Sreenivasan 2002).¹⁶

The litany of responses to Doris is interesting and penetrating, but we will not review them here.¹⁷ Our point is simply that philosophers have thus far expended the lion's share of their energies objecting to Doris's descriptive project and have by and large neglected his prescriptive project. Although we think there is much interesting work to be done to investigate Doris's descriptive situationism, this will not be our task here. To be clear: *we will not be focusing our attention on either project in isolation of the other*. Rather, we will be arguing that upon closer inspection, there is a deep tension *between* them; we are skeptical that Doris can in good faith advocate *both* the descriptive and prescriptive project, at least in their current forms. The upshot is this: even if Doris is able to defend his descriptive project against detractors, there is still a further problem looming.

To bring this problem into relief, recall PS2, which advises us to adopt a strategy of situationist moral deliberation. Consider the seemingly innocuous question, "How are we to

¹⁴ See, for example: Sreenivasan (2002), Montmarquet (2003), Kamtekar (2004), Annas (2005). Situationism has also had, in some form or another, its supporters, which, in addition to Doris and Harman, include: Vranas (2005), and Merritt (2000).

¹⁵ Upton (2009) has also pointed out the fact that common criticisms of Doris's situationist project have centered on what we have called his "descriptive project."

¹⁶ One obvious way character could remain obscure to observation is if someone takes a principled stand on issue like the relief of poverty, and discharges this duty in one lump sum. So both Sally, who gives ten dollars to someone on the street two hundred times per year and Jessie, who writes one check for two thousand dollars every year, might be equally compassionate. Yet one is much more likely to observe Sally's behavior. Kamtekar (2004) illustrates this point vividly.

¹⁷ Upton has reviewed some of this critical literature in her 2009.

describe someone who becomes adept at this kind of deliberative strategy?" In other words, in what ways would we evaluate the person who takes Doris's advice to heart and becomes reliable in choosing morally conducive situations and avoiding morally threatening ones?

It will be beneficial if we flesh out what kind of person we have in mind here, someone we will call Gwenda. Gwenda has read Doris's work and has become convinced that she should give up using robust character traits in explaining and predicting people's behavior and stop trying to inculcate the moral virtues so as to improve her character.¹⁸ Gwenda is also persuaded that she will have increased moral success if she starts paying more attention to her environment, avoiding those situations that seem morally dangerous and entering into those that seem morally conducive. After years of practice and experience, Gwenda has become reliable at successfully appropriating the situationist strategy of moral deliberation. In other words, she consistently *thinks* in terms of situations, assessing their "moral threat level" and, moreover, she properly *acts* by reliably entering into those situations she sees as morally healthy. She is not infallible at this. Once in a while she forgets to think in terms of situations or does not act properly with respect to them, but this means only that she is not perfect. She is, however, reliable at choosing and avoiding certain situations.¹⁹ By and large, she does her "cognitive duty" in attending to the determinative features of situations.

There are a number of interesting facts about Gwenda. First, Gwenda chooses well *cross-situationally*. This will mean two things. First, Gwenda chooses well when she is *in* a variety of different circumstances. In other words, she chooses the right situations while *at* the gym, work or home, and with her friends, family, or strangers. In other words, she reliably chooses well in whatever kinds of environment she finds herself, even those that are new to her.²⁰ That Gwenda chooses well cross-situationally will also mean that she chooses well when *faced* with diverse kinds of moral choices. In other words, she chooses well when faced with situations that span the variegated moral terrain. Gwenda reliably avoids a vast assortment of threatening situations, whether they present temptation to commit adultery, steal, lie, or be mean.

A second important fact about Gwenda is that we could accurately *predict* and *explain* Gwenda's behavior in terms of her ability to choose good situations. When we stand witness to Gwenda as she engages in compassionate, generous behavior at work and at home, and are asked *why* she acts in such ways, it will be both appropriate and accurate to say that Gwenda does so *because* she chooses good situations and exhibits positive trait-stability in those situations. Supposing you know that she is a good situation-chooser (let us say she tells you she is, and you have little reason to doubt her due to her past moral successes), you will also be

¹⁸ If we, as moral agents, really do not have a characterological moral psychology and should therefore abstain from using characterological terms when predicting and explaining moral behavior, we take it to follow that we should not take character traits to be a *goal* for the moral agent. In fact, Doris says as much: "Rather than striving to develop characters that will determine our behavior in ways substantially independent of our circumstances, we should invest more of our energies in attending to the features of our environment that influence behavior outcomes" (Doris 2002, p. 146).

¹⁹ We take reliability here to mean only something quite modest, maybe something like: Gwenda is a reliable situation-chooser if she deliberates about moral choices in terms of situations 60 % of the time, and chooses the more morally conducive situation 60 % of the time.

²⁰ One might wonder whether we are entitled to the assumption that Gwenda could do this. We think we are, for a few reasons. First, keep in mind we are not supposing that Gwenda *always* chooses morally conducive situations, only that she is reliable in doing so. On its face, there seems to be no reason to think this is question-begging. Second, if Doris wants us to take seriously the claim that situationist first-person moral deliberation is a strategy grounded in an empirically adequate view of human psychology, surely it should be the kind of activity that he thinks is possible for humans to do reliably. Third, but less importantly, if some version of an 'ought implies can' principle is correct, then it is reasonable to assume that if Doris recommends that we reliably utilize situationist deliberative strategies, that such a thing is possible.

able to *predict* reliably her behavior in the future. You will know that she chooses morally conducive situations more often than not and will therefore be able to predict accurately that she will not engage in less than professional behavior with her colleagues because you believe that she will not attend the infamous staff Christmas party.

Again, we take the relevant question to be not whether a person like Gwenda *could* exist. Surely, Doris believes that someone could actually read his book, take his advice to heart, and reliably choose morally conducive situations. Indeed, he claims that such an approach can “effect a considerable reliability in ethical behavior.”²¹ In fact, we suspect Doris holds out hope that a great number of (non-fictional) people will join the ranks with Gwenda as they forsake the misguided aims of character-based moral deliberation and embrace a situation-based moral deliberation. So we do not think that a detractor can rightly claim that we are simply constructing a piece of fiction in thinking about someone like Gwenda who reliably demonstrates situationist deliberation and decision-making. At the least, we don’t think *Doris* would object on this score. We take Doris at face value when he writes what he does about his program of behavior modification. We take it that his program is practicable for many.²²

So what is the problem? Well, as we have presented things, it appears as if Gwenda will possess the very thing from which the situationist has attempted to distance herself: the *robust character trait* or *virtue* of being a “good situation-chooser” (henceforth: Chooser). As Doris understands virtue, it is a disposition to act that is “firm and unchangeable,” silencing “temptations to vice,” causing quite consistent and predictable behavior in “ever-various and novel situations,” and being “substantially resistant to contrary situational pressures, in their behavioral manifestations.”²³ But does this not sound a great deal like Gwenda and her reliability in Choosing? Doesn’t Gwenda “carry around with her,” so to speak, a robust trait that she employs reliably, across the spectrum of situations she faces, which predictably trumps situational pressures to vice?

Here, we pause to consider an objection. It might be suggested that it is a requirement of Doris’s prescriptive program that our decisions be made in cool rather than hot environments and that this feature distinguishes this kind of ability from the virtues, which are operative in cool and hot contexts alike.²⁴ This is an interesting suggestion, but we have our doubts regarding its veracity. We submit that there is good reason for Doris to reject the claim that Choosing can (or should) only be made in cool deliberative situations. That is, we think that Doris should accept that Choosing both can and should take place in hot deliberative contexts if such Choosing is required. Take the can-claim first. As we understand it, Choosing is the manifestation of a disposition to choose reliably to enter into situations that will secure behavioral outcomes in line with one’s moral values. There is nothing about this disposition per se that suggests to us that it could only be made manifest in cool deliberative contexts. At the very least, it would take an argument to show otherwise. Second, take the should-claim. One reason to accept the should-claim is that the situations in which we find ourselves—the situations in which we must make choices regarding future situations—are not wholly of our own making. The world often conspires against us: such is life among other autonomous agents. Given this fact, we are often called upon to Choose, even if we are already in a hot deliberative context not of our own Choosing. If we find ourselves in hot deliberative contexts, forced to make a decision about which future situation to enter into, and we want to try to secure behavioral outcomes in line with our values, and the options before us are: (a) don’t

²¹ Doris (1998, p. 517).

²² We thank an anonymous referee for pushing us to clarify this point.

²³ Doris (1998, p. 506).

²⁴ We thank a referee for this journal for raising this point.

make a choice about which situation to enter; (b) make a choice, but do not manifest the disposition of Choosing; and (c) manifest Choosing, the best course is to manifest Choosing, option (c). It's hard to see why Doris would want to reject this claim. One should try to cultivate Choosing and manifest it, even if one is in a hot deliberative context.²⁵

It appears then, that Doris has prescribed the very thing he has set out to remove from our moral theory and practice: a robust character trait. To bring the problem more clearly into focus, let us step back and examine DS1 and PS1. Recall that DS1 claims that robust character traits are empirically inadequate—their putative existence is not a good predictor of human moral behavior and therefore they are not good explanations of people's moral behavior. Such traits are few and far between and even when we do find them at the very ends of the moral "spectrum," they are either "pathologically" abnormal or they are abnormal in the sense that they do not promote "sound mental health." And so for both epistemological and ethical reasons we should seek to banish them from our ethical reflection. But if we are right about Gwenda, then Doris has prescribed something such that, when successfully appropriated into one's "habits of ethical reflection," effects desirable moral outcomes across the terrain of one's moral deliberative contexts. How, then, are we to understand this habit that effects considerable reliability in Gwenda's ethical behavior?

6 Explaining Gwenda

In this section we want to explore three ways that the situationist can explain Gwenda's adeptness at situationist deliberation. We will also argue that each option is either untenable on its own terms, or does violence to some other situationist thesis, thus evincing an unsustainable tension between Doris's prescriptive and descriptive projects. In the previous section we suggested that when PS2 is successfully appropriated into Gwenda's habits of thought and action, such a disposition looks at first blush very much like a robust character trait. And yet DS1 suggested that robust character traits were to be no crucial part of an account of moral psychology.

One tack for the situationist is just to agree with this appearance and be open about the fact that what Doris is advocating is, indeed, a robust character trait. Even though much of the situationist project is critical of virtue's place in an empirically adequate moral psychology, if it turns out that Choosing is the most effective way of securing ethically desirable outcomes, we should happily embrace it. After all, there is nothing about the conclusions of the descriptive project that entail that there are no robust character traits at all, or that it is psychologically impossible for agents like us to inculcate a trait like Choosing. Rather, what the descriptive project says about traits is just that they are empirically inadequate to carry the burden that both folk theories of moral psychology and virtue theories of ethics place on them. But this is not to say that a very austere "virtue theory," one that focuses on just a single virtue—the cross-situational character trait of reliably attending to (and acting in light of) the morally relevant features of situations that determine behavioral outcomes—could have no place in the situationist program.

Recall, however, that Doris has said that such a broad and stable disposition is both rare and psychologically abnormal. These points were to count in favor of different theses Doris has

²⁵ Indeed, some empirical work suggests that hot contexts can actually *help* us to see what to do. Knobe 2005 argues that when faced with moral decisions, we employ a kind of "moral module" that elicits certain affective responses (like disgust); our affective responses in such hot contexts can then actually guide us to respond in the right ways.

employed in his attack on globalism. That the broad traits are rare, and perhaps moreover difficult to attain, was to count toward showing that the broad-based traits were empirically inadequate. That is, this fact was to support DS1. Moreover, broad-based traits were said to be a sign of psychological abnormality, not merely in the sense of being out of the norm but in the sense of being somehow undesirable. This fact is at least partially behind motivating PS1. But if one follows the situationist prescriptive program to the letter, one will have a broad-based trait. And it will not be undesirable. Confronted with this tension, Doris will have some explaining to do. Jettisoning both DS1 and PS1 would do great damage to the foothold the situationist had tried to establish. It was, after all, in setting situationism side-by-side with a more traditional picture, and by highlighting the relative merits of the situationist project that Doris was to sell situationism. Minus DS1 and PS1, situationism looks somewhat unmotivated. Perhaps the situationist can retain these theses, but it remains to be seen how that will be accomplished.²⁶

A second tack that appears open to the situationist is to argue that Choosing, even if it is cross-situationally reliable, it is not a *character trait* at all. Rather it is simply a kind of *practical skill*.²⁷ On this view, Gwenda's becoming good at choosing morally conducive situations is much like becoming good at picking flavorful cantaloupes at the supermarket (henceforth: Picking). Other kinds of practical skills are typing, throwing a curveball, and slicing a tomato. On this approach, Choosing can be understood on the model of Picking. Picking good cantaloupes is a practical skill, such that when possessed, can be reliably carried out in a variety of skill-relevant situations. It involves learning from others what aspects of good cantaloupes to look for and practice in doing so. Choosing is also a practical skill, such that when possessed, it can be reliably carried out in a variety of skill-relevant situations. It involves learning which situations are morally conducive (say, from social psychologists, taking into account one's own specific set of local traits), and practice in choosing such situations. And just as one can become very good at Picking, one can become very good at Choosing. Hence, we can explain Gwenda's adeptness at following the prescription of PS2 without doing violence to any other situationist thesis.

This looks like a promising route. But is choosing morally conducive situations really that much like picking good cantaloupes? We suggest that it is not; although both Choosing and Picking are practical skills, Picking is *merely* a practical skill, but Choosing is not. To see why, recall the examples of practical skills provided above: typing, throwing a curveball, slicing a tomato, and picking good cantaloupes at the market. All of these practical skills have two features, what we will call *mere skill requirements* (henceforth: MSRs).²⁸ Any skill that is merely a practical skill will possess each of these properties. MSR1 is what we can call the *detachment requirement*. A skill meets MSR1 if it is devoted to bringing about ends from which we can detach ourselves if we cease to want those ends, without doing violence to any final end we might take for ourselves. In other words, I can detach myself from picking quality cantaloupes without raining down ruin upon my *raison d'être*. I might cease practicing my Greek or slicing

²⁶ An anonymous referee suggested that our position is vulnerable at this point. Doris can simply say that not all global traits are bad, just the ones called upon by virtue ethicists. This is an interesting avenue, were Doris to take it, but we think that this move will not save Doris. As we see it, Choosing is rather like Aristotelian *phronesis*, wherein one takes good (or the best) steps to get what one wants. Doris encounters a problem: if *phronesis* is ruled out by his descriptive claims, he has prescribed the very thing he has said is to be avoided. That is precisely the tension to which we are seeking to draw attention. If he does not rule out *phronesis*, then his assault on traditional (Aristotelian) character terms is not so thoroughgoing as we have been led to believe. Peter Nichols suggested this kind of response in conversation.

²⁷ We owe this suggestion to Michael Bishop.

²⁸ In this section we draw heavily from a very helpful discussion on practical skill and virtue by Annas (2005, p. 518).

tomatoes, and many professional baseball players have given up pitching, but none of this entails that they have, by detaching themselves from these mere practical skills, inflicted injury upon their final ends. The most broad, over-arching ends to which one devotes oneself (e.g. the good of one's community, loving one's family and friends, leaving a legacy for one's children, and loving God are but a few) are unaffected by one's ceasing to pick flavorful fruit.²⁹

MSR2 is what we can call the *independence requirement*. A skill meets MSR2 if it can be carried out relatively independently of one's emotions or feelings. There are no specific conative or affective states called for when you pick out cantaloupes. You may do so when you are sad, or lonely, or bubbly, or on cloud nine. And you may do so for reasons of revenge (to snatch the best one from my neighbor's garden because she did the same to you last year), or for reasons of selfishness (to prove to your family that you pick the best fruit), or for reasons of care (to seek your family's good), or for a variety of different possible motivations. The practical skill of picking cantaloupes is compossible with a great variety of conative and affective states, spanning the emotional and moral terrain. The same goes for slicing tomatoes, throwing a curveball, and typing.

We submit that while Picking meets both MSR1 and MSR2, there is good reason to think that Choosing fails to meet either of them.³⁰ What this reveals, we suggest, is that although there are some structural similarities between Choosing and Picking, there are significant differences and that these differences are instructive. More specifically, we will argue that while Choosing and Picking are both practical skills, Picking is merely a practical skill, whereas Choosing, because it fails to meet both MSRs, looks like a disposition to act for *certain kinds of reason*: a virtue.

Picking meets both MSRs, but Choosing fails to meet either of them. With respect to MSR1, assume the descriptive project is correct and consider a person who (1) desires that her conduct be in line with her deeply held moral values and goals, but (2) decides, for whatever reason, to cease Choosing. Could this happen? Keep in mind that for Doris, the best (if not only) route to morally desirable outcomes is through situationist deliberation. Now if Choosing were a mere practical skill should you not be able to cease Choosing and yet maintain a devotion to achieving your final end? Can you detach yourself from the skill of Choosing without also detaching yourself from your final ends? We think not; you cannot just cease Choosing because you do not have time for it, or because it is no longer a hobby, or part of

²⁹ Granted, for some, the ceasing of some mere skill *does* bring great distress because that skill has *become* their final end. We might think of athletes, whose greatest aim in life is to become the best at some mere skill. But we would also think of such persons as having *misguided* aims in life. If one's ultimate end in life is to sink a little white ball into a hole in the ground in the fewest number of strokes, one's most pressing problem is not having lost this skill, but having set one's ultimate goals in having such skill. Such a person is not a counterexample to this requirement; rather, such a person serves to show how seriously misguided it is to live one's life as if one's primary function is to engage in mere practical skill.

³⁰ At this point, one might wish for us to develop more fully the internal structure of Choosing. We are hesitant to do so for a couple of reasons. First, what we have called Choosing is really Doris's own notion, and Doris himself does not address in detail its internal structure. Because our goal in this paper is to highlight a tension that exists within Doris's own project, we do not want to impart a lot of theoretical baggage regarding what is involved in Choosing. The danger here would be that, in giving a fuller account of Choosing, Doris may respond to our criticisms by saying, "Well that's just not what I have in mind when I suggest we should become good Choosers." And that would be that. By forwarding an admittedly bare notion of Choosing, we take ourselves to have the best chance at revealing a tension in Doris's project. Second, we believe we can motivate this tension by drawing attention to the external similarities between Choosing and other global traits. At the least, we take ourselves to have shown a striking external similarity between them. If we are correct, this shifts the burden to Doris to have to say more about what Choosing is and whether it really does differ from global traits. The reason the burden would become his is because if our arguments go through, then *for all he has said*, Doris appears committed to taking Choosing to be a global trait. If Doris wants to say more about what he has in mind with respect to Choosing, that is of course his project to take up. But that is not *our* project.

your profession. It is intimately connected to why you get up in the morning, what drives you to do good, why you resist the flirtatious advances of a married co-worker; it is tied to your intentions, your unsheddable values, *you*.

What about MSR2? If Choosing is like other mere skills, then we should reasonably expect to be able to do so relatively consistently independent of emotion or feeling. Is this right? Can one appropriately Choosing to the same degree of success when one is happy as when one is terribly lonely? This does not seem to be an accurate picture of how we make moral choices; our moral lapses often flow from emotional states like anger, loneliness, rage, jealousy and the like. One might be able to type around forty-five words per minute whether one is lonely or angry, but we strongly suspect (in fact, we know, say the situationists!) that one's ability to avoid inappropriate flirtatious advances will not be as immune to loneliness. Here again we find that Choosing, if a skill, is not a *mere* skill, or at least the kind of thing the situationist might take it to be.³¹

The situationist can of course demur to our notion of mere skill. They may grant that Choosing fails to meet either MSR, and therefore may not be a skill like Picking, but that it is still *some* kind of skill. But here the situationist encounters another hurdle. If the situationist wants to take Choosing as a skill she must show how it is a skill distinct from the skill involved in virtue. Keep in mind that even virtues, or character traits, are acquired skills to think and act in certain ways. Virtue ethicists do not believe that these putative traits magically appear in the lives of persons as they go about their lives. They are acquired and practiced. Aristotle understands virtue (*aretē*) as “skillful living” or “excellence of function.” It is a practiced ability to act: “excellences develop in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature, but because we are naturally able to receive them and are brought to completion by habituation...we acquire the excellences through having first engaged in the activities, as is also the case with the various sorts of expert knowledge—for the way we learn the things we should do, knowing how to do them, is by doing them.”³² So even robust character traits, or virtues, are kinds of skills, things that we learn, practice, improve upon, and execute as we live our lives. The burden, then, falls to the situationist to provide for us a non-ad hoc definition of Choosing that is, on the one hand, not a mere skill but, on the other, is qualitatively distinct from the kind of skill which comprises virtue.³³ This is a very narrow rope to walk, and we are not quite sure what this kind of skill would look like.³⁴

³¹ It has been suggested to us that something like learning how to perform a certain medical procedure on a sick family member or learning certain anger management skills in order to avoid becoming an abusive parent seem to be skills but that they look to be on all fours with Choosing with respect to the MSRs. Granted, actions like the above are surely skills, but they do not look like *mere* skills. There appears to be an aspect of virtue in both of them, at least, that is how they intuitively strike us.

³² See Aristotle (2002: II.1.1103a20, 1103a30).

³³ For a full treatment of the kind of skill involved in virtue, see Annas (2005).

³⁴ Here is one possible suggestion: Choosing involves acting on principles or rules, while virtue-like traits involve acting after consideration of various courses of action (or vice versa). This is indeed a difference meriting further investigation, but it does not appear that the difference holds. In the first place, the virtuous person will simply see the virtuous thing to do; she will not need to deliberate or consider courses of action (perhaps the same can be said of a vicious person—the cheater will simply see an opportunity to cheat). Second, there is no reason why Choosers must act exclusively from either rules or considered courses of action—they may well act from a combination of rules and considered courses of action. Although we take no particular stance on the etiology of action as such, we do think that when it comes to Choosing, what typically happens is that the Chooser sees a situation and then applies a rule, such as “Don’t be in a private room alone with an attractive colleague.” Other times, the morally relevant features of situations may not be immediately obvious and so we may need to reflect and consider the options before us. Once we have done so, however, we may then apply the relevant rule. Supposing that the disposition to do so is broad and stable, our claim is then that Choosing is very similar to other moral broad and stable character traits. We therefore cannot see why Choosing per se would differ from other kinds of broad-based character traits in this respect. We thank an anonymous referee for raising this point.

A third approach open to the situationist is to explain Gwenda's adeptness at situationist deliberation with just the resources provided by *local* character traits.³⁵ This strategy is the obverse of the second, for the previous strategy was to claim that Choosing is cross-situationally reliable but only as a practical skill, not a character trait. However, we have seen that there is good reason to think that Choosing is not *merely* a practical skill. It is a practical skill to be sure, but one that looks more like a virtue, given that it fails to meet both MSRs. Perhaps, then, the situationist can grant that Choosing is a character trait, but only a local one—it is not the kind of cross-situationally reliable trait with which virtue ethicists have been concerned. Therefore, on this approach, we can account for Gwenda with just local trait stability, thereby allowing the situationist to avoid prescribing a robust character trait. How might this response proceed?

Choosing, the situationist might argue, need not be employed in all situations. In fact, it need be applied only in a very narrow range of cases: those involving moral judgments. This would provide a range of relevant cases akin to those seen by other narrow-based traits. So Choosing falls well short of the broad-based, traditional style traits in terms of scope. On this move, Choosing is one coherent trait, but it is not sufficiently wide-based to count as a globalist trait. Call this Local Tack A. Alternatively, the situationist could argue that Choosing is a series of local traits, including those that lead to morally desirable behavior in at-home situations, in with-friend situations, in all-by-myself situations, etc. What appears to be one global trait is in fact a collection of loosely related narrow-based traits. The appearance, the situationist would argue, is in this case deceiving. Call this Local Tack B.

But we have some worries about these responses. Consider Local Tack A. If Choosing is seen as the fulfillment of the prescriptive program presented by situationism, it is going to cover a wide range of cases indeed. If it is taken to be the general awareness of situational factors that threaten to derail acting in accordance with one's values, Choosing will have to cover not only cases of esoteric moral deliberation, but also the kind of moral deliberation we carry on in the classroom, in abstract discussions, or in making "big" life decisions. One of the central thrusts of the situationist challenge is that our behavior can be undermined in subtle ways by seemingly morally insignificant factors. In order to be a good Chooser, one must be, it seems, ever aware of one's environment. Behavior in quotidian circumstances can be influenced by temperature, affect, and odors, even if the agent is *presently* unaware of the threats. If Choosing qualifies as a narrow-based trait despite applying in this sweeping range of cases, perhaps the virtues would count as narrow-based on this understanding of 'narrow'.

Turn to Local Tack B. Choosing *can* be explained as a series of related traits aimed at perceiving and overcoming derailers in the environment so as to effect morally desirable behavior. But it can be explained as a single broad trait as well. Why would the one way of explaining Choosing be preferable to the other? If one wants increased predictability and explanatory power from a trait, narrower traits may be preferable. In fact, we could make each trait relevant to a unique event, providing 'perfect' explanatory power (e.g., Doing-what-one-does-on-Tuesday-May-third-at-high-noon). If one wants economy of terms, wider is preferable. Fortunately, we do not think this debate is one those questioning situationism need enter. Why think that the local traits remain local when they are seemingly brought into a harmony in the way Gwenda has done? Do they not seem to form an organic whole, governed by an overarching ability to choose the appropriate situations, to allow the appropriate lower level trait to issue in the appropriate behavior at the appropriate time? And isn't this just what being virtuous is supposed to be? At the very least, it sounds like Aristotelian practical wisdom. In brief, even if the local traits do not disappear when one appropriates situationism's deliberative

³⁵ This suggestion was initially put to us by Michael Bishop.

strategies, one develops the broad-based trait of being a good Chooser, and, as we have seen, this appears tantamount to saying that one has become virtuous.

7 Conclusion

In this paper we have not sought to argue against either descriptive or prescriptive situationism in isolation from one another. We have instead sought to tease out an as yet unrecognized tension within John Doris's situationist project. While every discussion of situationism of which we are aware focuses on some aspect or other of what we have called descriptive situationism, we have tried to spell out Doris's two central prescriptive claims and bring into relief a tension between his prescriptivism and his descriptivism. The general worry is that what it takes to become good at choosing morally conducive situations looks a lot like a robust character trait—a kind of trait he has claimed is empirically unfounded. Of course, the situationist is not without options at this point in the discourse.

The first option available is to argue that Choosing, the culmination of one's appropriating prescriptive situationism, is a global trait, but that there is nothing wrong with this particular trait from a situationist point of view. But Doris's project gained plausibility in part in light of condemning global character traits. If it turns out there is nothing wrong with Choosing, the door will be opened for the legitimacy of other global traits (or the same trait by different names), like those employed in globalist accounts. The second option involves denying that Choosing is a trait; it is, rather, a skill. Unfortunately, however, Choosing looks much more like a virtue than a mere skill. Given that Choosing fails two plausible requirements of "mere skills," it falls to the situationist to convince us that Choosing is, nonetheless, a mere skill. Finally, the situationist can insist that local traits can do all the work in explaining what Choosing is and how it is employed. On this move, there is no need to invoke a broad-based trait. The situationist might argue that the trait is narrow-based because it is relevant to only a limited slice of one's activities. Given, however, that the situationist also argues that our behavior is susceptible to widespread and hidden threats, Choosers seem to be ever-vigilant against the temptation of derailers. So the trait seems quite broad-based. As a twist on this final situationist option, it might be suggested that a *series* of local traits can do the job of Choosing. But if they are to work in harmony with one another, they seem to require some overarching trait that sees to their fruitful interaction with one another. And this master trait seems to be broad-based: a virtue.³⁶

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³⁶ We wish to thank Jamin Asay, Gregory Sadler, and Craig Warmke for commenting on previous incarnations of this paper, as well as Peter Nichols, who offered many valuable discussions about situationism. Some of these ideas were presented at Northern Illinois University, University of Iowa, Grand Valley State University, and Franklin College, and we thank those audiences for their generous feedback. Finally, we thank Michael Bishop, who helped plant the ideas that resulted in this paper almost 10 years ago and who read multiple early drafts.

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